



The Petchenegs

Author(s): C. A. MacArtney

Source: *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 8, No. 23 (Dec., 1929), pp. 342-355

Published by: the [Modern Humanities Research Association](#) and [University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4202402>

Accessed: 15/06/2014 11:44

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Modern Humanities Research Association and University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Slavonic and East European Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE PETCHENECS.

OF all the nations which at various times have played their part on the crowded stage of Eastern European history, few enjoyed so unsavoury a reputation during their prime, and few are so utterly forgotten to-day, as the Petchenegs. Yet this race, now long since vanished, has left its enduring mark on the world's history. Without the Petchenegs, the Magyars might never have entered Hungary, the Northern and Southern branches of the Slavs never have suffered division ; without them, again, the early Principality of Kiev might have grown to such strength as to sack Byzantium in the 10th century, and destroy the chief centre of European civilisation ; without them, Alexius Comnenus might have beaten back the Seljuk Turks unaided, and the Crusades might have been deferred, or even abandoned altogether. It is worth while devoting a few lines to their obscure story, which, incidentally, yields a much less unfavourable impression of them than their enemies would have us believe.

The Petchenegs were undoubtedly a race of pure Turks, but their early history is obscure, and attempts to deduce it from their name cannot be regarded as wholly successful. It is often connected with the Turkish *bádjanak*, brothers-in-law, signifying, perhaps, a coalition of two closely related nations. It is certain that in the 10th century, when they were divided into eight hordes, three of these claimed superiority over the rest, and bore the generic name of “Kangar,” which the Greek writer who gives this detail interprets as meaning “nobility and valour” ;¹ but it is far more likely that he is in error, and that the name is simply derived from the Turkish *qān* = chariot ; all contemporary writers insist strongly on the chariot life of the Petchenegs.

When first heard of,² in the early 9th century, they were

¹ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio* (D.A.I.), c. 37.

² The oldest detailed report on the Petchenegs is one that has been preserved in three versions : the Arabic writers Ibn Rusta and al-Bekrī and the Persian Gardēzi. The common source of these three is probably the early 10th-century Djaihānī, who again took over, almost unchanged,

occupying the steppes between the Volga and the Ural rivers, and living an apparently inoffensive life. A regular trade route ran through their territory between Khwārisim and the countries of the Khazars and Volga Bulgars. They must have profited from this trade, for we are given the somewhat unexpected information that "the Petchenegs are rich; they have many animals and sheep and vessels of gold and silver. They have weapons in plenty and belts of silver and standards and short spears which they take into battle, and they have trumpets well-shaped on the outside, which they sound in warfare." Nevertheless, their life was not one of sheer prosperity; their neighbours raided them for slaves; and about the year 880, after one of the general Central Asiatic moves which are usually caused by the drying up of some feeding-grounds, the Uz on their east and the Kimäk on their north-east combined with the Khazars on the west, and forced most of the nation to migrate with bag and baggage. Some remained behind among the Uz, who took their feeding-grounds; and, rather touchingly, wore kaftans cut short, and shortened sleeves, "to show that they are cut off from their compatriots." The remainder, organised in eight hordes, crossed the Volga and the Don, fell upon the Magyars, then occupying the country on the right bank of the lower Don, and in 889 drove them west across the Dnieper. In 895, the Magyars having allied themselves with the Greeks against Simeon of Bulgaria, the latter called in the Petchenegs, and the new allies drove the Magyars clean out of Russia and into their present homes. These defeats left such a deep impression on the Magyars that when, in 944, the Greeks tried to induce them to return and expel the Petchenegs, "all the chiefs of the Magyars cried out with one voice that 'we will not embroil ourselves with the Petchenegs; for we cannot make war against them, because it is a big country and a numerous people, and they are bad fellows. And do not come to us with such propositions; for we do not like them.'"¹

The Petchenegs now had the steppes more or less to themselves, from Sarkel, the Khazar fortress on the Don, to Silistria on the Danube. It seems, however, very doubtful whether they were west of the Dnieper in any force much before the middle of the 10th century, and in any case, a considerable Slavonic

a description by a Khwārisan merchant dating from the early 9th century. Al-Bekrī's version contains additions which are probably incorporated from one of the lost works of Mas'ūdī.

¹ D.A.I., c. 8.

and other population continued to exist side by side with them. Of the two Slavonic tribes on the Bug and the Dniester, the easternmost, the Ulicy, abandoned their homes and settled on the Dnieper, near Kiev, about 913; but the other, the Tivertsy, were still independent of Kiev in 944. The treaty of that year between Kiev and Greece shows the Russian prince in control of the territory on the right bank of the Dnieper, while the theme of Kherson was still wholly Greek. The same treaty mentions what must have been a trading depot of the Volga Bulgars near the Dnieper mouth; and elsewhere we have references to other Greek colonies round the shores of the Maeotis.¹

The Petchenegs lived at peace with their eastern neighbours, the Alans and Khazars. With Kherson they drove a flourishing trade, largely as go-betweens for the countries farther east, and for the land routes to Russia. They or their predecessors had, however, destroyed all the old agriculture of the steppe, since the Greek colonies were obliged to import cereals from Asia Minor. In reward for their services, and doubtless, also, in exchange for slaves, they took from the Greeks somewhat exotic luxury wares: purple dyes, silk cloaks, fine clothes, jewellery, pepper, and purple-dyed leopard-skins. Constantine Porphyrogenetos describes them rather sourly as "altogether insatiable for the things that are rare in their land," and describes how the diplomatic envoys would ask for "something for themselves and something for their wives," and the guides for "something for their own trouble and something for their horses." They were not, however, solely go-betweens; they bred horses, sheep and cattle, which they traded with the Russians.

In war, their central position made them formidable; they could make the Russian trade down the Dneiper exceedingly hazardous, since the traders had to disembark at the rapids, and carry boats and cargo down an exposed stretch of land. They were ready, too, to pounce on wrecks driven ashore. They were dreaded by the Magyars and Bulgars, courted by the Russians; and their raids reached as far as White Croatia, north of the Carpathians. By the middle of the century, at least, they were arranged, in roughly symmetrical fashion, four hordes east of the Dnieper, and four west; but the four former would drive their herds up into the hills of Moldavia during the summer heats.

Nevertheless, the idea that the Petchenegs were extremely formidable is due to the chance that Constantine Porphyrogenetos

¹ *E.g.*, in the letters of Theophylactos, Archbishop of Bulgaria. Cf. especially Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, CXXVI., col. 412.

wrote his famous strategical treatise at a moment when, almost for the first time since 895, they had intervened actively in international affairs. On one previous occasion—during the war between Greece and Bulgaria which began in 914—both sides had sought their help, the Greeks with bribes, Simeon with the offer of a marriage between his daughter and their principal Khan. It seems likely that a Petcheneg detachment actually joined with the Bulgars in sacking a Greek frontier fortress;¹ but afterwards, although they got as far as the mouth of the Danube, they refused to help the Greeks, whose commanders were quarrelling among themselves. On this occasion they had made a treaty with Russia, apparently to secure their flank when passing through Slavonic territory. There seems to have been some sporadic fighting afterwards, but certainly nothing like a general state of war between the two nations. In 944 they joined the Russians as mercenaries in a campaign against Constantinople, were bought off, and set to ravage Bulgaria instead. It was almost certainly the lessons of this year that induced Constantine to lay down peace with the Petchenegs as the guiding principle of Byzantine policy in the north.

They do not seem to have taken any part in Svyatoslav's eastern campaigns, which resulted in the establishment of Russian power in the old Khazar strongholds of Sarkel and Taman; but when Svyatoslav invaded Bulgaria, in 968, they appeared suddenly "for the first time" outside Kiev, "with an innumerable army," and besieged the queen-mother. Svyatoslav returned hurriedly, drove the Petchenegs off, and patched up a peace with them. Some of them accompanied him on his second Bulgarian campaign; but the Greeks won their support again, through negotiations which their chroniclers have glossed over, and when the defeated Russian returned home, they lay in wait for him at the rapids, and slew him. Their Khan, Kur, made his enemy's skull into a drinking-cup, within which he is said to have engraved the words, "He who covets the property of others often loses his own."

After this incident their relations with the Russians grew worse, and Vladimir was forced to carry through an elaborate system of fortifications to protect his frontiers against their raids. None the less, the first—and last—at all impartial glimpse which we get of them shows them on the defensive,

¹ Mas'ūdī, *Meadows of Gold*, p. 413. Mas'ūdī's story is confused; but the two nations which attacked "Walandar" must have been the Bulgars and the Petchenegs.

rather than as aggressors. In 1008 the German missionary Bruno determined to convert them. Although warned in Kiev that he would certainly be killed, he penetrated to their country, dissuaded them from their initial impulse to slaughter him, and actually remained several months in their country, making thirty-six sincere converts. Finally, the whole nation agreed to become Christians, if Bruno would secure peace between them and Russia. He did so, and consecrated his attendant Catholic Bishop of the Petchenegs. Although he describes his flock, in most unpastoral fashion, as "the most evil and cruel of all pagans on this earth," Bruno at least escaped with his life, whereas the Prussians, to whom he went next, killed him out of hand; but the conversion does not seem to have been lasting.¹

By this time Russia was beginning to reap the fruits of the destruction of the Khazar empire. The barrier down, Uz, themselves pressed by Cumans (Kipchak Turks), were beginning to press across the Don. The Petchenegs found themselves driven into the westernmost corner of their old territory. A few isolated groups had already entered Hungary, even in St. Stephen's day; but there is no reason to believe that they had crossed the mountains in large numbers previously to 1050, and we have record only of a single raid on Gyulafehérvár, which may, indeed, have been carried out by Vlachs. But by 1026 the pressure must already have been severe; for in that year the Petchenegs began to cross the Danube on frequent raids. These were due, not to wanton ferocity, but to economic pressure consequent on the loss of the old feeding-grounds; but they were savage affairs. The Greeks were forced to give the threatened provinces—the Paristrion—a special defensive organisation; and in 1036, following a particularly severe raid, they concluded a treaty with the Petchenegs, recognising them as "allies" of the Empire. This treaty the Petcheneg Khan kept honourably enough for twelve years, until it was broken by the Greeks themselves.

The same year saw the last appearance of the Petchenegs, as a nation, outside Kiev. They were defeated by Yaroslav, who has in consequence acquired the reputation of having saved Russia from this enemy. The fact is, that their real conquerors were the Uz, who had now driven them behind the Dnieper line. Certain khans, however, sought refuge with the Russians, and were settled by them as frontier guards. Others probably

¹ Bruno's letter to King Henry II. is reprinted in Giesebrecht's *Kaiser-geschichte*, II., 606 ff., and in Miklosić, *Slavische Bibliothek*, II., 324 ff.

entered Hungary; they are mentioned as mercenary troops in that country, for the first time, in 1051.

Shortly after this, a long struggle between the Petchenegs and Byzantium began.¹ Ill-feeling had arisen between Tyrach, hereditary Supreme Khan of the Petchenegs, and a low-born but valiant adventurer named Kegen, who took the lead in repelling the incursions of the Uz while his indolent overlord was "skulking in the marshes at the Danube's mouth." Feeling his supremacy threatened, Tyrach tried to assassinate his rival, who thereupon took refuge, with his party, in Greek territory. Well received by the Emperor, he was granted patrician rank and a fief in the Dobrudja, and was baptised with all his followers; an event which he celebrated by raiding Tyrach's hordes, taking them prisoner and selling them into slavery. Tyrach protested against this breach of his treaty with Byzantium, and receiving an unsatisfactory answer, himself led his men across the Danube.

The Greek chroniclers say that the entire nation crossed the Danube. Later events prove that this was not the case; but the newcomers were so numerous that it might have gone hard with the Greeks, had not sickness broken out among the Petchenegs, as the result of over-indulgence in mead. The Greeks, led by Kegen, massacred them as they lay helpless; their leaders were taken to Constantinople, where they were baptised and well treated, and the surviving rank and file were settled in the plains of Central Macedonia, Niš and Sofia, which were nearly depopulated. It was proposed to use them in the Greek army; and, in fact, 15,000 of them were sent in the following spring (1049) into Asia Minor, against the Seljuks; but mistrusting the intentions of their new masters, they turned back, swam their horses clean across the Bosphorus, and rode back to their compatriots. Arming themselves as best they could, the whole nation gathered together, recrossed the Balkans, and settled in the district round Šumen. Tyrach and his fellow-chiefs, who were sent to reason with their followers, promptly joined forces with them, and inflicted a devastating defeat on the Greek army. Kegen was sent to mediate, and was promptly "chopped into little pieces"; and after several years' fighting, the Emperor was obliged to conclude peace (1053), granting them undisturbed possession of the land occupied by them, which seems to have comprised the Dobrudja and what is now North-Eastern Bulgaria. The fortified towns were not, however, handed over to them.

¹ For the following story, Cedrenus, ed. Bonn, II., 581 ff.

The conversion of Tyrach and his companions had afforded occasion for the most extravagant encomiums to the Emperor ; but by the time the story was ended, the Emperor had learned, as the chronicler sadly remarks, " that it is useless trying to whiten the Ethiopian." Certainly the attempt to play off one section of the nation against the other had proved a conspicuous failure, and the Petchenegs were unrestful neighbours for the Danube cities. Despite occasional risings, however, they kept the peace fairly well, helped the Greeks to repel the great Uz invasion of 1065, and served as mercenaries in their armies on many occasions.

In 1073, however, when a rebellion broke out among the cities along the Danube bank, the Petchenegs made common cause with the rebels, with whom they were in close relations. In 1077 large numbers of Petcheneg forces supported Bryennius in his attempt on the throne ; and it was mainly owing to their unreliable conduct in the battle of Calobrya that Bryennius was defeated. After this they supported various rebel leaders north of the Balkans, with whom Botaniates was obliged to conclude more or less humiliating treaties. It is no exaggeration when Anna Comnena tells us that when her father ascended the throne the Imperial frontier was at Adrianople.

In the meantime, the Uz in Russia had been practically wiped out, but the Cumans were at the height of their power, and were exerting a pressure on the Carpathian regions such as was not to be repeated for a century. An increasing number of Petchenegs seem to have taken refuge in Hungary, and were settled, some in Transylvania and Slovenia, but the most part along Hungary's western frontier—the Schütt Insel and the Counties of Pressburg, Wieselburg and Oedenburg. It is uncertain whether the great raid of 1069 was carried out by Petchenegs or by Cumans. The raid of 1072 was certainly Petcheneg, but seems to have been made at Greek instigation by the colonists settled round Niš. It was not successful. Large numbers were taken prisoner, but regained their liberty by fighting for King Geysa against his cousin, Salamon. Their very appearance, and in particular their long and truculent moustachios, so frightened an Austrian soldier of fortune who had promised to help Salamon that he ran away without striking a blow.¹ A third invasion, in 1089, from Moldavia, is again doubtful, some sources attributing it to Cumans, others to Petchenegs.

¹ Thurocz, II. 50 : "*Videns horribiles aspectu et terribiles, timebat.*" Bonfinias, II. 3 : "*nam illis mos est . . . demissas ferre barbas, et labri vel matrine superioris nutrire pilos.*"

It would appear as though the descendants of those Petchenegs who crossed the Danube under Tyrach and Kegen had, in the course of the next thirty years, either settled down and intermingled with the peasant population, or been almost exterminated by the ruthless fashion in which they were used to fight the battles of the Greeks. A second great migration across the Danube occurred in the winter of 1085–86, this time without the consent of the Greeks, whose writ had ceased to run north of the Balkans, but by arrangement with the semi-independent chieftains of the Danube fortresses. The move seems to have been due to a fresh advance by the Cumans; and the arrival of these new forces gave the signal for a general revolt by the malcontents in and north of the Balkans. The first object of the Petcheneg immigrants was not, indeed, to overthrow the Imperial power, but to make a living for themselves, and they offered the Emperor to enter his service with 30,000 horse. Alexius Comnenus, however, refused the offer, and advanced across the Balkans, confident in his power to crush the invaders. Instead, he was defeated with great loss, and all might have gone well with the Petchenegs but for the intervention of the Cumans.

The latter had been called in by Tatos, the rebellious commander of Silistria, to help in the campaign; but they arrived too late for the fighting, and the Petchenegs therefore refused to share the booty with them. The result was a quarrel which must have been more severe than we can tell from the chronicles; for in the following spring (1088) a Petcheneg force which seems to have comprised all the survivors of the new arrivals crossed the Balkans with bag and baggage, wife and child. This national migration into foreign and hostile territory was certainly not undertaken in mere lust of aggression, but under the impulse of a greater danger in the rear—the pressure of the hostile Cumans. The fact is that these unhappy invaders had no way in which to turn.

The Emperor at first concluded a treaty with them, assigning the Upper Tundja valley for their occupation, and promising to supply them with victuals. When the Cumans arrived, athirst for the slaughter, Alexius sent them away with gifts. No sooner were the Cumans gone than the Petchenegs began to raid the surrounding territory, but readily made peace, on receiving fresh overtures. It is at least possible that the Greeks had failed to carry out their share of the former treaty, and supply provisions. But the new treaty again did not last long. In the spring of 1090 the Petchenegs came down into Thrace and for a whole

year raided and terrorised the country up to the very walls of Constantinople. Only in the spring of 1091 did Alexius succeed in concentrating a considerable force near the mouth of the Maritsa. He was unexpectedly reinforced by a large body of marauding Cumans, and the combined forces surrounded and utterly crushed the wretched Petchenegs, slaughtering great numbers of men, women and children, and selling others into slavery. Some able-bodied men, with their families, were spared and settled at Moglen, in Macedonia, to form a special contingent of the Greek army.

These mercenaries, and others who were doubtless descendants of the older colonists, made themselves unpleasantly noticeable to the Crusaders, who now began to pass through the Balkans and encountered hostile Petchenegs, acting under Greek command, both at Belgrade, in Macedonia, and along their whole route, and even outside Constantinople itself. As one of the reasons why Alexius had appealed to the Crusaders was to deliver him from these same Petchenegs, they were disagreeably surprised at this new state of things, and it was responsible for much of the ill-will between the Emperor and his latest friends. We also hear of Petcheneg mercenaries serving against the Normans; and a party who were captured outside Brindisi in 1106 were taken to Rome and shown to the Pope as an awful example of the instruments which Alexius was using against Christians. They were employed as far away as Syria in 1108. "Scythian" mercenaries are frequently mentioned as forming an important part of the Greek army during the next half-century; but except on very rare occasions, it is impossible to say with certainty whether these were Petchenegs, and by 1150 probably most of them had been killed off, or had been merged in other nations.

The great battle of Lebunion took place on 29 April, 1091. A doggerel rhyme current at the time ran:

"The Petchenegs would have seen May
Had they survived one more day."

The lyrical celebration of this battle by the daughter of the victorious commander-in-chief has given rise to the belief that it was the end of the Petcheneg nation. This is not the case. The forces engaged were wiped out; but these were only those Petchenegs who had crossed the Balkans, comprising most, but probably not all, of the migrants who crossed the Danube in 1085-86. As the Danube frontier was not really restored after

this event—or at best, the Imperial authority was very shadowy there—it is probable that outside the towns much of the population between the Balkans and the Danube continued to be Petcheneg. The Cumans do not seem to have colonised so far west. Large numbers, too, continued to inhabit Russia. Many were settled in frontier towns; but many more continued independent, while others were enslaved by the Cumans. After their first great victory over the Cumans in 1103, the Russian princes captured “Petchenegs and Torks” (Uz) whom they found in the Cuman camp.

After that defeat, the Cumans, who from 1080 to 1100 had overrun the whole Russian steppe and invaded both Greek and Hungarian territory, were gradually pressed back to the Don. The Russians, however, did not, for half a century after, extend their own frontiers into the steppe, which thus remained a masterless territory, extending practically from the Dnieper to the Balkans and the Carpathians. The population of this territory doubtless included both Slavs and Vlachs, but in the main it consisted of remnants of the Uz and Petchenegs, who in this long period of comparative peace were able to recoup their diminished forces. In 1122 they made their final appearance in history as a nation. Some event unknown to us had upset the tenor of their life. The Russian Chronicle reports that “in 1120 the Torks and Brodniki abandoned Russia, and after showing themselves now at one point, now at another, they were entirely dispersed.” Under the vague term Brodniki, as events show, must be understood the Petchenegs; for Greek and Syrian sources show the Petchenegs crossing the Danube in the following winter, in numbers and with a confidence which recalled the days of 1090, and ravaging Greek territory. They seem to have occupied the Danube valley for a full year before John Comnenus managed to raise a force against them, and some of them at least had crossed the Balkan range and pitched one of their great camps, composed of an encircling wall of their heavy chariots, in the plain to the south of it. The Emperor at last got the best of them by treachery. He invited parties of them into various cities—some entered Constantinople itself—and made as though he were going to treat them as friends. Suddenly he arrested all his guests and marched out against the camp, which he took only after a very severe struggle. It is interesting to learn that the soldiers who at last breached the chariot wall, and so brought about the destruction of the Petcheneg nation, were English foot-soldiers, armed with battle-axes. The slaughter was

great, and the day of it was kept thereafter as a special festival, "Petcheneg Day." Some of the survivors, like those of Lebunion, were colonised, probably on the frontiers of Albania, and formed into a special legion. Others were sold into slavery.

Here again, however, we have proof that the slaughter was not so complete as the Greek chroniclers would have us believe. Some of the survivors fled to Hungary, where the favour accorded them by King Stephen aroused much jealousy among the Magyars. Persecuted by the Magyars, the Petchenegs approached the king in tears; and he promised them tenfold redress if he should recover from the sickness then afflicting him. In their joy they pressed forward to kiss his hand with such fervour that he had a relapse and died—a strange end indeed.

After this, the Petchenegs never appear again as an independent nation in force. For a century more, indeed, they continued to inhabit the No man's land which was later to be known as Roumania. At times they are mentioned by name in the Russian chronicles, and sometimes under the transparent description of the "Kibitki," or "heavy chariots." They are even mentioned, after the Mongol invasion, as one of the hordes of the Cumans; but it is doubtful whether this is not an anachronism. More and more, the old names of Petcheneg and Uz tend to disappear, merged in the new federation of Karakalpaks (Black-caps), or the partly Slavonic "Brodniki."

In the Balkans, the Petchenegs soon disappeared. One or two villages and a small stream in the Dobrudja preserve their name to the present day. Some authorities believe the Šops of the Sofia plain to be the descendants of this nation. Certainly very strongly Mongolian types are often seen among them, and they still preserve a reputation for ferocity in warfare and stupidity in peace-time beyond the ordinary.

In Hungary they preserved their identity longer. The name Bissenus occurs fairly frequently in early Deeds; for that matter, the Magyar form, Besenyö, is by no means unknown as a proper name to-day. Villages with the name of Besenyö, or compounds such as Besenyö-Tarlo, are common. Most of them are found along the western fringe of Hungary, but they occur throughout the kingdom. We find them acting as a separate fighting force on various occasions between 1051 and 1146; but not later. They are not mentioned in the great Banderia of 1453, unless concealed under the name of Philistaei (bowmen). Entering Hungary, as they seem to have done, in scattered and fugitive groups, they never obtained a national status, like that accorded

to the Cumans. They received treatment in accordance with their rank. Some were nobles, and even held high office. Some were slaves or serfs ; most appear to have been free peasants, enjoying certain privileges and immunities in return for military service. These privileges, however, were regulated locally. One instance, dating from 1222, has been preserved. The "Comes Bissenorum," or Palatine of Hungary, as general over-lord of the Petchenegs, lays down rules to be preserved by the Count of the Petchenegs of Arpas, in the County of Sopron. Here, too, however, they were gradually killed off, or merged in the other population. Even so, their descendants must constitute a high proportion of the Magyar-minded population of the Burgenland, the Schütt Islands, and other districts.

The Petchenegs were not a lovable nation, but although the dictionaries of their enemies were dredged for terms of abuse, few specific acts of cruelty are alleged against them. In fact, they seem usually to have preserved their prisoners, especially if of noble rank and capable of paying ransom. On one occasion, when their leaders proposed putting certain Greek captives to death, the common people insisted that they should rather be sold back, and this was done.¹ Their salient characteristic was not so much cruelty as greed in all its forms. I have quoted Constantine's description of their commercial methods ; and on more than one occasion they indulged in such orgies of over-eating and drinking as to render themselves helpless in battle. Their own fare was normally of the roughest. The Greeks commonly allege that they were totally ignorant of agriculture, and ate nothing but horseflesh, raw or roughly roasted. It seems, however, as though the women at least practised some primitive form of agriculture.² For clothes they normally wore a long gaberdine ; men and women dressed alike. The nobles affected silken raiment, and among the bribes offered them were also vessels of silver for their table. The charge of cannibalism made against them is probably a fable, but the accusation that they ate lice is borne out by the habits of many of their kind. In personal appearance they were unprepossessing, like all true Turks : small of stature, short of leg, large of head, with slanting eyes and prominent cheek-bones. They wore their hair long and affected formidable beards and moustachios. The men seem

¹ *Anna Comnena*, I., 352.

² The invaders of 1085, who are said to have "settled down and raised a harvest," were undoubtedly Petchenegs, *not* Vlachs. The settlers round Sofia, when they revolted and migrated back across the Balkans, armed themselves with scythes and similar implements.

to have passed much of their lives on horseback. For recreation they enjoyed the music of pipes and cymbals.

In battle their chief arm was the bow, with which they were very skilful, although they also used javelins and battle-axes. It was their habit to charge their enemies with frightful howls which inspired terror ; alternatively, to draw them on by simulated flight until their ranks were disordered, when they would reform and charge suddenly. When raiding parties were out alone, they would disperse with incredible rapidity if attacked by superior numbers, taking refuge in mountains or in marshes, in which indeed they were often drowned. If they were moving with their families, they would make a vast enceinte of their characteristic heavy chariots, leaving oblique openings through which they would retire when fatigued, later dashing out again to renew the battle. Their women and children were kept inside the enceinte. On one occasion we hear of a woman who seized a Greek cavalry-man who had ridden right up to the chariot-wall, and cut his head off with a scythe. When fighting for their own cause, they were very courageous. As mercenaries, they were unreliable, especially when used against other Turkish tribes, to whom very naturally they often deserted. They were therefore much reproached for their ill-faith. Attaliotes, however, declares that, fearing that they meant to desert to the Turks, he made them swear fealty according to their own method, after which not one of them all deserted. There was, indeed, another trait which made them untrustworthy, namely, their intense greed for booty. When supporting Bryennius in his bid for empire, they defeated the enemy brilliantly, but subsequently broke up their own army by plundering the baggage-train. Yet plunder was, after all, their only inducement to risk their lives in an alien service.

One author tells us that some of them became converts to Islam, and we have seen that various attempts were made to Christianise them. Most of them, however, certainly remained heathen to the last. Their religion seems to have been a form of Shamanism. It sat very lightly on them, and their enemies accused them of having no religion at all.¹

Their political system was not so anarchistic as has often been supposed. In the tenth century they were organised in eight main hordes and forty sub-hordes. Each of the eight chief khans seems, to judge from the names, to have fulfilled some distinct and separate office for the nation. The rank was

¹ Psellos, cc. 57 ff.

hereditary, but passed, not from father to son, but to the collateral branches ; but never out of the princely family. Although the Greek official formula ran "to the leaders of the Petchenegs" (an analogous formula was in use for the Magyars, even after Árpád), they certainly in their prime acknowledged and obeyed one principal khan who commanded the whole nation in war. The various chiefs, indeed, preserved a large degree of independence, and by the twelfth century the unified command had disappeared. Their political system was in some ways rather liberal. There was a council of leaders to determine policy, but once, at least, the voice of the people reversed the decision of the leaders. The failure to maintain their national unity was one reason why they sank at last into oblivion. Another reason was possibly their stupidity, which was proverbial.¹ A third was the fortune of history ; they were caught between the organised systems of Greece, Hungary and Russia on the one hand, and the more powerful and numerous hordes of the Cumans on the other.

The few Petcheneg words and names which have been preserved do not show any Latin influence. Nevertheless, the Petcheneg element in the modern Roumanian nation must be strong ; and this alone should give this forgotten people some claim to the interest both of historians and of ethnologists.

C. A. MACARTNEY

¹ It is insisted on by the Hungarians and comes out clearly in the folk-legends in the Russian Chronicle. Cf. *Legenda S. Stephani Regis minor*, c. 7 : "*Gens Bissenorum . . . quasi belluina stultitia carens intellectu.*"